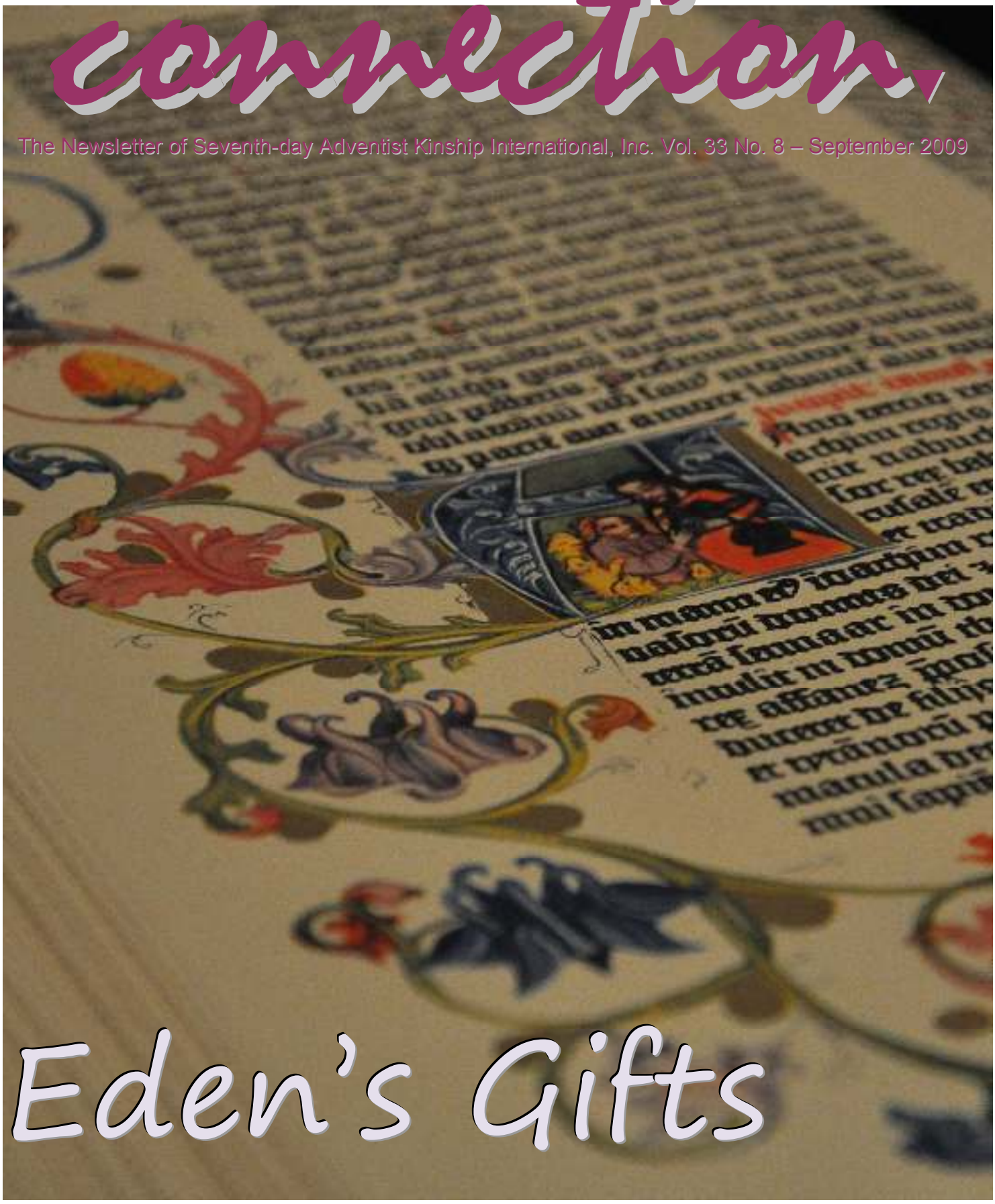
connection.

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 33 No. 8 – September 2009



Eden's Gifts

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Region 2 (MD, VA, WV, NC, DE, DC): Yolanda Elliott, region2@sdakinship.org
Region 3 (TN, AL, MS, GA, SC, FL): region3@sdakinship.org
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Region 9 (AZ, CA zip 93599-): region9@sdakinship.org

AFFILIATED INTERNATIONAL REGION COORDINATORS

Australia & New Zealand: Noel Thorpe, kinshipaustralia@sdakinship.org
Brazil: Itamar Matos de Souza, kinshipbrazil@sdakinship.org
Canada: Jerry McKay, kinshipcanada@sdakinship.org
Central & South America: Alexander Gomez Pasco, kinshipsuramerica@sdakinship.org
Europe: Ruud Kieboom,kinshipnederland@sdakinship.org
Germany: Roy Raetzer, kinshipgermany@sdakinship.org
United Kingdom & Eire, Mike Lewis, kinship_uk@sdakinship.org
Asia: Jonathan, kinphilippines@sdakinship.org

OTHER COORDINATORS

Transgender/Intersex: Christian Bryan, intersex@sdakinship.org / transgender@sdakinship.org
Older Adults: Ren Reynolds, olderadult@sdakinship.org
IMRU? (Young Adults Under 30): Ruben López, imru@sdakinship.org
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WHO WE ARE...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a non-profit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is an organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 1,550 people in more than forty-three countries. SDA Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn or even mention homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

SUPPORT KINSHIP

Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to SDA Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

SDA Kinship, PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA or visit SDA Kinship's website at: www.sdakinship.org.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST KINSHIP

From the Editor

Behind the Scenes

Those of you who read the* Connection *regularly are acquainted with our interviews and introductions. As I type this note to you I am remembering the time I talked with Reino in the sunlit garden cottage of his home in Sweden. He was telling me about the part of his early life in Finland when he came to an understanding that his feelings and attractions meant he would not live the same life as many of the Adventists with whom he was being raised. Reino said he went out on a hill overlooking the ocean, looked up to the heavens and said to God, "Well, You made me this way; You deal with it." And with that pronouncement he went on with his life. Every time I think of this story I have the same reaction. Spelled in English it's something like* arghflewhat! *All the angst I've been through over the Bible, the church, heaven and hell, my family, my community, my relationships—and this thirteen-year-old just looks up in the sky and realizes the essential truth that many of us take a lifetime accepting. Reino's revelation did not mean his congregation in Sweden, many years later, accepted his relationship with Ingemar. It did not mean that Reino found a Seventh-day Adventist church where he feels comfortable worshiping each week. It only meant a personal walk with God that superseded the ignorance of others and did not allow it to scalpel his soul. I wish there was a way to distill Reino's attitude and feed it to each of us. It's a rare gift. I am realizing, however, that Kinship may be one of the answers to Reino's command (is that too strong of a word when dealing with a prayer to the Orchestrator of the Universe?) that Heaven take care of the difficulties that would come for a gay man throughout his life. I believe that God has worked through this organization to create safe places, strong advocacy, community, opportunity, and family. And if God has created Kinship, along with a multitude of other allies, I wonder in what ways the Deity is "dealing with it" for each of us. There will be those who condemn our souls and our love—out of ignorance, out of fear, out of their internal demons. But their frailties do not have to harm your psyche or your soul. Look for your allies. Look for your safe places. Look for the ways that God is "dealing with it." This month we're writing about a few of those. Kinship's new president shares her vision. A straight film maker lets us know about her remarkable project of support. There is a rather long article on Biblical study that might give you some tools with which to address church folk. Ben and Rom continue their monthly articles which both "happen" to focus on your care. Most importantly, all of us in Kinship want you to take good care of yourself for you are infinitely valuable.

▽

A String Too Short to Save

Rom Wilder

I heard her cry out in pain as her head hit the coffee table. I heard Lynn comforting her. Then, as she always does when she gets hurt, she came down the hall to where I was working and told me all about it. I gave her a boatload of sympathy and suggested she go put a Booboo Bear on her head. Lynn had already gotten the cold pack (shaped like a bear head) out of the freezer.

A few minutes later the toddler came back down the hall, holding the small bear head on her own head. She told me again how the dog wouldn't get off her "Blankie" and she fell and hurt her head. I gave her more genuine sympathy and she went away. I heard her saying, "I'm happy now, Aunt Wynn."

Perhaps that's all even an adult needs sometimes. To be listened to and to have the ouch acknowledged

Rainbow Thinking

Yolanda Elliott

The other day, I was looking through the ad inserts from the newspaper and came upon an ad for stunning rainbow plants. The word "rainbow" caught my attention. The ad went on to say that these plants, also known as "Joseph's Coat," radiate a kaleidoscope of changing color. It got me thinking about the Bible story of Joseph and his coat of many colors, my favorite story when I was growing up. To make that coat stunningly beautiful, all of those magnificent colors were woven together to make one fabulous fabric. Of course, back then I didn't realize that the rainbow, with its many vibrant colors, would later have such significance in my life.

My view of Kinship is very much like that coat. What makes Kinship such a wonderful organization is the diversity of all of our members coming together to create one beautiful "garment."

As president of Kinship, I will do my very best to continue to support our current initiatives, such as our web enhancements, participation on our Advisory Board, and promoting our various regional and international activities.

I would like to see Kinship continue to find new ways to develop regions and chapters. The current system makes it very difficult for coordinators to be successful. Some regions are thousands of square miles with members so far apart that frequent meetings, or any meetings, are just out of the question. We have started to work towards more chapters within regions, but we have a long way to go. Your help with this is greatly needed.

I would also like for us to work towards increasing our membership as well as retaining our members. I have not missed one Kampmeeting since my first at Menucha in 1995; that's how at-home I felt and how much I felt I belonged. Because Kinship filled a void that I had within myself, I have tried to give back to this organization since then. I believe that there are many who desperately need what Kinship has to offer. If folks come into Kinship for a short time and then leave, who will be here to meet the needs of those coming after us? While working in Kinship has been a pleasure for me, it's still a lot of work. I wouldn't trade it for anything, but we need more members with a passion to serve.

There are too many LGBTI Seventh-day Adventists who have never heard of Kinship. I would like to see a much higher visibility of Kinship. We need to have more visibility at the college and university levels. I believe those of us who still attend Seventh-day Adventist churches should be visible, too. It's important to our Kinship members that there is reconciliation between their Adventist roots and being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. If Adventist church members can see that their relative or friend is just like them, it gives them the opportunity to learn and grow. While our mission is not to change people's minds, it is important that we provide an opportunity for our Adventist brothers and sisters to be better informed.

I hope everyone who attended Kampmeeting this year really enjoyed it. Naveen worked hard to make it a great experience for everyone. I'm sure that not everyone who wanted to be at Kampmeeting was able to go. It's obvious that there is limited money in the scholarship fund to help folks attend, and there are many other projects that also need funding in Kinship. We've talked about fundraising in the past. We want to keep costs for Kampmeeting as low as possible. However, we also need to pay for the projects that support our mission and about which we feel passionate. We must come up with a plan for serious fundraising, so that every single person who wants to attend Kampmeeting can do so, whether they have the money or not, and the projects that are important to us get funded as well.

Going back to Joseph's garment, I would love for all the "threads" that make up the Kinship garment to feel like an intricate part of the cloth. I hope that no part of our "cloth" would ever feel that Kinship is not an advocate for them. Each thread in the Kinship garment is vital. We are in this together; and together we can make Kinship better and better for each one of us now, and for those coming to Kinship in the future. We need to be that beautiful rainbow cloth in which each thread is important to the whole. You may not see how important one thread is; however, with many threads it becomes a beautiful and very strong cloth.

These are just a few thoughts about my vision for Kinship. I know there will be many issues and needs that arise, but with the dedicated members of the board, plus those that serve in a leadership capacity, I know we can handle whatever comes our way. With the amount of love for Kinship that is demonstrated by our members and by those who serve this organization, we can accomplish so much. ▽

Covenant

Ben Kemena

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you! Ruth 1:16-17 (Oremus Bible Browser)

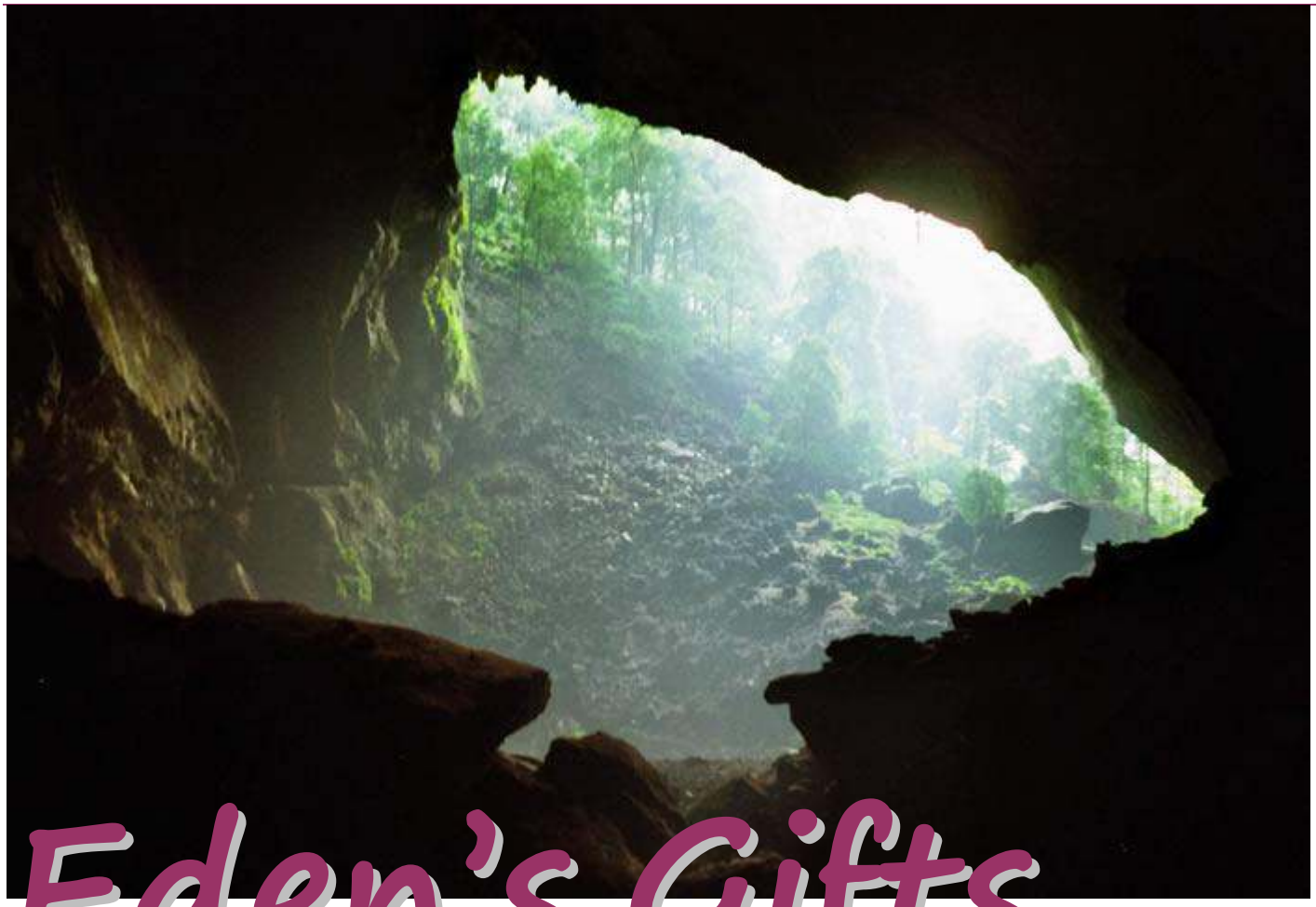
We hold these Scriptures familiar and dear. There are no more eloquent words of a covenant between human beings than these shared in the book of Ruth. Ruth said them to Naomi as she followed her kinswoman back to her own native land. Ruth's willingness to give up her own country, culture, and theology to adopt Naomi's country, culture, and theology as her own exemplifies the very heart of love. It enshrines the very soul of commitment in relationship.

This covenant relationship between two women warranted its own book in the Bible, apparently receiving God's blessing and the approval of others. The words of the covenant, said in private between Ruth and Naomi, imply that even a non-public and non-ritualized commitment contains genuine power that is honored by God. Whether a particular church or institution recognizes our marriage covenants has never been an issue for our loving Savior.

God honors the genuine commitments of our heart—and this example shared in Scripture calls upon all Christians to honor loving commitments including covenants shared between two women or between two men (as we might also remember David and Jonathan).

Bless our covenants, loving God, bless the love of women with women and men with men. May we always bless the holiness of love as shared between loving human beings.

(Based on a study by Chris Glaser, *The Word is Out*)



Eden's Gifts

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I am one of those people who thinks in pictures and visualizes what I read and hear, coloring the gaps between words. In my work as a therapist specializing in psychological trauma, I listen to and help my clients learn to bear the stories of painful and horrific events. In my off-work hours something shifts. I cry at commercials. There are newspaper articles I won't finish. Friends and family put Post-it® notes on book pages telling me to skip reading about some act of pain caused to an animal and then resume reading two paragraphs later.

There are also chapters in the Bible I want to avoid. When Matthew notes the dream of Pilate's wife, I always find myself whispering to the Roman governor, "Listen to your wife, Pilate! Listen!" The same thing happens when I read Genesis 3. I call out across time to Eve, "Trust the Holy One, Eve! Run from the evil one who has filled the body of the beautiful serpent!" She never listens and the story again unfolds. For me the scenario is heart-breaking each time I read it. I ache because of the pain of knowing what will happen. I also ache for the love of a God who will go to such extremes to rescue us.

Despite my visceral responses, I have spent my life learning the remarkable lessons sent to us from the Garden of Eden. A pattern that struck me recently is that several changes have happened as a result of the sin of our first parents, of the ways that Adam and Eve violated the intentions and principles laid out as creation unfolded. Some of these changes are condemned in the Bible; some are not, **even though** they do not meet the original ideal or God's intent.

This paper is meant to initiate and encourage a discussion. I look forward to hearing your questions and responses.

In the Biblical text there are clear descriptions of what will destroy our relationship with God. Eve's desire to "be like God," to have the power, knowledge, and immortality without understanding that "the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self sacrificing love" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 19) replicated the fall of Lucifer because of that angel's aspirations to selfish power and honor. Adam's inability to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" led him to mistrust the character of God and God's plan for what would happen to fallen Eve. He ate the forbidden fruit because he chose not to trust God's love. One of the first relational results of sin was a pattern of blame and the inability to take responsibility for personal choices that have caused rifts in humans' interactions with each other and, indeed, with all of creation for millennia. The Bible story provides detailed results of this shift in our nature.

There are, however, some results of sin, changes in our enzymes, brain structure, and neurons for which no condemnation are mentioned. Our digestive enzymes changed. The Edenic plan was for us to eat food (seeds, grains, nuts, legumes, and fruit) for which no plants would die. Adam was given "the plants of the field" to eat. Green leafy vegetables were added to our diet to meet our needs. The synapses and neurons of our brains began to grapple with the emotional and physiological effects of grief, something for which we were not originally programmed. Psychological trauma causes a change in the structure of the brain and is responsible for our inability to manage emotionally intimate relationships. We lost our garment of light.

Human beings in the Bible and post Biblical writings have never been condemned because we had to find clothing constructed of fibers other than light molecules. Nor have we been condemned for grieving or for being traumatized. Other questions might arise: what were the skin tones of the original pair? Are other skin colors the result of our fall? Perhaps the need to adapt to different climates or intensity of sunlight might not have been present if we had stayed in Eden. Why weren't these changes condemned? What about the differences in brain function that have some people right- or left-handed? Which brain dominance would have been God's original intent? Why were these variations not condemned? What was God's original intent for when Earth was fully populated? Would our reproductive systems have retired? Were there other options in the mind of the Omniscient One?

Becoming Berea: Bible Study Methods

As we study the complicated issues faced by fallen humanity, I believe it is important to struggle for an understanding of which effects of sin will keep us from the Heavenly kingdom and which are non-condemned results of sin or loss of God's original intent. One of the qualities of the Bible that has confused many of its students for centuries is apparent inconsistencies in a variety of contexts. Sometimes one behavior is allowed. Sometimes it is condemned. As a Bible-believing Christian, I believe it is imperative to find those answers inside the Sacred Text. I also believe that the supposed inconsistencies become clear if we utilize the following foundational methods of Bible study:

1. Have an understanding of the difference between:
   a. Biblical principles, which are never-changing and eternal.
   b. Biblical policies that have shifted depending on the time in history and context in which the policies were developed.
   c. Biblical practices that are the ways followers of God have lived their lives. Some of these are condemned. Some are not, even though they did not appear to follow God's original intent.
   d. Biblical present truth. Each age seems to have a specific testing focus, lesson, or truth that faces believers.

   Some believers have not been able to delineate the difference between these aspects of Bible teachings. That confusion has led to decisions and behaviors that have been hurtful to other living beings.
2. Understand the context in which a message, policy, or story was written and the people to whom it was written.
3. Consider the meaning of a word or phrase in the original language and in the context of the Biblical passage in which it is found.
4. Study the object lesson or story illustrating the principle. The Bible uses people, events, places, and rituals to represent spiritual principles. Hebrew is a language that uses concrete words to represent philosophical concepts. It is a culture that clearly understood the meaning of metaphor. One of the great gifts the Hebrew Scriptures give us is the opportunity to gather many levels of truth from structures, events, lives, stories, ceremonies, and holidays.

Biblical Principles

Many, if not all, of the primary Biblical principles were delineated in the Garden of Eden. In this paper we have time for a few examples. When God gave humanity **dominion** over creation, we were bestowed an opportunity to experience the way heavenly beings utilize power: to protect, to nurture, and to serve the vulnerable. This principle has been reiterated in such proclamations as the Isaiah 58 sermon, some aspects of the Sabbath commandment, and most notably in ➢

the life and teachings of Jesus. **Relationships** were given as a way to understand the love, caring, and intimacy shared by the members of the Deity and the way They use their relationship to sustain all parts of creation. Our relationship with God was predicated on our **trust** in One who had clearly demonstrated care for us. Even in Eden we were to make a distinction between the values of Heaven and the selfish power-mongering of the evil ones. No other being was to supersede Yahweh. **Diet** was meant to nurture our bodies so that we could be physically, mentally, and spiritually strong. We were to learn the ways that these three aspects of our being are intertwined. **The Sabbath rest** was given to us for our pleasure, to appreciate the power and care of God's creation, and as a time to particularly enjoy the relationships given to us at Creation.

Page from the Gutenberg Bible

Biblical Policies

While there were some policies put in place before our fall in Eden, it is easier to track policy shifts once the plan of salvation was activated. Immediately upon leaving Eden, our **diet** was changed to include the plants of the field, green vegetables. After Noah's exit from the ark, humanity's diet was expanded to include clean animals killed in a humane fashion. During the time of Paul, the discussion expanded to consider whether or not to eat food offered to idols.

In Eden the most intimate **relationship** between mortals was one between two recently created human beings and was designed to last throughout eternity. Immediately after the Fall it was permissible, and indeed imperative, to marry siblings; and the relationship was to last until death. At the time of Abraham it was permissible to marry a half sibling. In Levitical times policy was shifted to forbid intermarriage between siblings. Then it became an abomination to marry even a half sibling. In Levitical times divorce was permitted. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reiterated principles of life-long marital relationships and later noted that in Heaven there would be no marriages at all. While the principle of relational importance has remained sacred, the policies around it have shifted depending on context.

Throughout Biblical history there have been various policies put into place regarding the **Sabbath**: harvest manna in the previous six days, pickup sticks in the previous six days, care for animals and the vulnerable encouraged, close the gates of the city, etc. Among Seventh-day Adventists today the principle of the Sabbath is sacred, but the policies around that principle are culturally based. In some places children are allowed to go swimming. In some places believers are not allowed to ride bicycles. In some places you can take a bath or shower during the sacred hours. In some places you cannot.

Biblical policies about how the children of God exercised their **dominion** have included the killing of animals for clothing and for food, the taking of slaves, the expectation that approximately 25% of one's profit was to be used to alleviate the suffering of the poor, the encouragement of hospitality to the stranger and foreigner, rest for animals on the Sabbath, rest of the land in the seventh year, usury forbidden, freedom from debt in the Jubilee, etc. God met people and nations where they were in their spiritual development and instituted policies that would help those people in that time learn the eternal principles at a pace they could bear.

There were, of course, other policy changes. In Eden we were clothed in light. After the Fall, God made coverings of animal skins. Later textiles were developed. In Levitical times it was forbidden to use clothing made of two different materials. After the Exodus a policy was put in place in which a non-Israelite could not be part of the Hebrew congregation for several generations. After the idolatrous debacle on the borders of Canaan, Moabites (heretofore seen as extended family) were proscribed and made an abomination. During Paul's ministry, Christian women in Corinth were told to cover their heads to differentiate themselves from pagan priestesses.

Biblical Practices

For many students of the Bible, some of the most difficult situations or stories described in its pages portray practices or behaviors of God's followers that do not seem to follow God's policies but are not condemned in the text. In Genesis 25, Abraham is described as being married to Keturah but still having concubines.

Despite the policy excluding Moabites from Israel until the tenth generation, Ruth, a Moabite woman,

marries an Israelite (twice) and becomes a member of the people of Israel. Within three generations, one of her descendants becomes Israel's most beloved king. Following Biblical policies, David should not have even been a member of the tribe.

I personally have the most difficulty with having Jephthah listed in the Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11. It looks to me like he sacrificed his daughter in some way as part of gaining a military victory.

Esther chooses to enter a polygamous harem relationship with an idolatrous king but is lifted up as a deliverer of her people, risking her life to protect their very existence. In the cases of both Ruth and Esther, the courageous and selfless actions of these women, while not following Biblical policies, are described in language that could make them object lessons of the Messiah. Tamar sets up a situation in which she has sex with her father-in-law, conceives a child, and, instead of being condemned, becomes an ancestress of Jesus.

One of the similarities among all of these people was their willingness to **trust** Yahweh and follow wherever He led. Their intent and motive was to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God. In their own time of history, from their own cultures, with their own human flaws, these people chose to follow the principles of Eden, to trust God, to have no others before the Deity. I wonder if these people are an example of mortals who "look on the outward appearance but the Lord looks upon the heart."

These uncondemned ones were lifted up as heroes of the Bible. It seems that the commitment to build and maintain a relationship with God, the decision to follow wherever God led, and the commitment to the principles of Eden took precedence over the policies, even good policies, of the time.

Present Truth

Despite the fact that God's character and love, the Great Controversy, and the plan of salvation have remained consistent, there appear to be decision points at various junctures of Biblical history that are tests of faith upon which the future religious experience of God's people are predicated.

* Do not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The principle involved was **trust** in God and an understanding of our place in **dominion**. The test was unique for that time period because it was the decision about who would rule Earth.
* Enter the Ark. Was God's creation willing to accept the object lesson of the plan of salvation for that time?
* Leave Ur and follow Me where I lead you. Are you willing to be the object lesson of following God's lead on the way back to Eden?
* Have faith that the promised child (to Abraham and Sarah) will be a miracle child conceived only by the intervention of God. Are you willing to **trust** in God's word so you can be the object lesson for this time period, based on the needs of this time period, of the miraculous birth of the promised One?
* Separate yourselves from the practices of the heathen people around you. Israel's incorporation was the intended object lesson of a Heavenly people whose **trust** in God's method of sacrifice and power, understanding of God's **dominion** and care for others, **diet** that protected physical, mental, and spiritual health, and observance of the principles of the **Sabbath** would make them an enticement to the people around them to follow a loving God.
* Christ is the Divine Son of God. Are you willing to accept as the Master of the universe, One who will not free you from the politics of Rome or the tyranny of the rich? Do you want the god of power, or will you understand that God's power is the power that will serve by washing the feet of others and will focus on protecting the vulnerable?
* Jesus will come again soon. Are we willing to accept that we are not immortal? To accept that our future life rests on Another? Are we willing to worship Him on the same day as Heaven does, in preparation for living there? Are we willing to **trust** His word? Are we willing to acknowledge His form of **dominion** and to understand that our place in it is not to use our power against others but to show such nurturing love that they will be drawn to being ready for heaven?

I believe that the concept of working with Biblical principles, policies, practices, and lessons of present truth is vital to the study of any spiritual issue. They help us understand God's priorities. However, in this paper, I have taken your time and your thought to lay a foundation for discussion of how Bible-believing Seventh-day Adventists can look at four of the Biblical texts used to condemn people who are in same-sex, monogamous relationships. In what ways do our policies reflect the primary principles given to us in Eden? In what ways do they differ? What are the ways we can institute practices that carefully follow Eden's principles? What is God's bigger picture?

I would like to note that these thoughts are part of a conversation of many different students of the Bible. Different thoughtful students come to different opinions. This speaks to the complexity of the issue and of the textual nuances.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Both of these texts are part of the Holiness Code given when Israel was inaugurated into nationhood. Leviticus 17-26 describes a set of policies designed ➢

to make certain the Hebrew people would be *distinctly different* from the pagan cultures around them. In dress, in understanding the meaning of the temple and the sacrificial system, in ceremonial times such as Yom Kippur and the year of Jubilee, in diet, in relationships with each other and with non-Israelites, in the way Israel expressed their trust in God as they observed Sabbath, in the way they learned about dominion as they cared for the earth, animals, and each other, Israel was to stand apart from the violent, self-absorbed, child-sacrificing, power-hungry nations at their borders. They were to grow from a people inoculated with the superstitions and values of Egypt to citizens of their own nation, living Heaven's principles.

Israel was to be an object lesson of separateness: nothing co-mingled, no reminders of pagan practices. Prohibitions included: no mingling of seed in the field, no mingling of materials in the cloth, no practices connected with fertility rites.

Sexual intercourse between assumedly hetero-sexual men was forbidden on several counts:

1 It was a normal part of the forbidden fertility rites. Sexuality was used to gain power, satisfy the local gods, and manipulate life outcomes by pacifying selfish deities. Its precepts assumed a lack of **trust** in a benevolent God and a desire for power instead of service as a focus of **dominion**.

2 The Canaanite practice of the anal rape of conquered or subjugated peoples violated God's principles of care for the vulnerable and replicated the violence and denigration abhorred by God.

3 The *seed* contained in semen was to be used for procreation, needed at a time when Israel was a small nation still commanded to populate the earth. As part of the separateness code, it was not to be co-mingled with other seed or to be spilled on the ground in an act of selfishness. People who could not produce children were considered cursed.

In this particular policy it is interesting to note that there is no mention of long-term committed sexual relationships between men and nothing at all about same-sex relationships between women.

Seventh-day Adventists are called to be a people who live out Heaven's principles. As I have said several times, we are a people who want to follow the teaching of the Bible seriously. However, in our studies of the sacred texts we have come to understand that some policies given to Israel in the time of Moses are not applicable to us today. Meat-eating Adventists are not commanded to eat meat flesh killed in the Levitical fashion. Adventist men do not leave the sides of their head unshaved. Adventists are not told to wear clothing made of only one fiber. We have not been commanded to avoid companion planting crops. We do not make

A rare 2,000 year old Hebrew document written on papyrus

slaves of neighboring nations (as far as I know). We do not stone those who either do not keep Sabbath or keep it differently than we deem appropriate (as far as I know).

Today, the means by which followers of Yahweh are differentiated are based on non-Levitical criteria. Ellen White has mentioned that the two worst sins in the church are self-righteous self-sufficiency and back-biting. We are to be set apart and noted for avoiding those behaviors. She has suggested that, as a relationship practice, "not until you feel that you could sacrifice your own self-dignity, and even lay down your life in order to save an erring one…are you prepared to help your brother" (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 128.) We have been commanded to follow the practices described in Isaiah 58 and 1 Corinthians 13 as well as to learn and follow the meaning of Sabbath rest, trusting in God, eating a diet healthy for us, understanding that only God is immortal, and knowing that it is Jesus who, by returning, will rescue the world from the mess we have created. While Ellen White repeatedly mentions the sanctity of marriage, nowhere does she say it is only between a man and a woman; nowhere in her writings does she condemn long-term committed same sex relationships.

Ellen White does condemn the "strange sin of Sodom." If we follow her practice and see how the Bible describes that strange sin, we will find in Ezekiel 16:49: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom. She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things." This certainly fits with God's focus on our mandates of protective and nurturing dominion.

Ellen White wrote extensively on sexual mores, but

did not specifically address homosexual behavior or orientation. What is interesting about her choice not to address the issue is that the concept was well-known in her lifetime. The first papers on sexual orientation came out of Europe in the 1840s and the term was in common usage in America by the 1890s. For many years, some writings of Ellen White were used to justify the church position against homosexuality, but these references had to be withdrawn when further review showed that Ellen White was addressing inhospitality rather than condemning gays and lesbians. In the latest 1999 Policies adopted by the Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church you will find no reference to Ellen White as a footnote or supporting comment.

Like the children of Israel, Adventists are to be a people set apart, a people noted for their love, belief in the mortality of humankind, healthy diet, belief in the Sabbath, and an expectation of the soon return of Christ. Do our policies and our practices demonstrate the principles that have been set before us?

Romans 1

…is a holy diatribe, a remarkable and riveting denunciation of those who have refused to follow Yahweh. Paul begins his epistle by sharing his eagerness to "preach the gospel…. I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God" (vs. 15, 16). With that statement he proclaims his focus and intent to compel his listeners to understand the import of his message. The good news or "present truth" of his day was that the creating, covenant-keeping, selfless, redeeming Deity had appeared in the flesh as Jesus. Paul's proclamation of this gospel underlined the love of God for all created beings and delineated the methods he had used to reach mortals. "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made. Men are without excuse" (vs. 20). The rocks have cried out. The lessons of creation have been available to anyone who would listen. The loving Master of the universe used that very universe to give, even to those who did not have access to the Hebrew Scriptures, lessons of salvation. The falling rain and mist rising to the clouds have been lessons of unselfishness. The care animals have for their young have demonstrated the way their Creator cares for us. They are a call to **trust** the teachings of that Creator, to partake of the character of the Yahweh.

Paul is speaking to a Christian congregation surrounded by a city where the cult of Aphrodite was one of the primary sources of worship. Like the Canaanite fertility practices, this cult used sexual intercourse as a way to gain power from the pagan gods to influence various aspects of their lives. Despite examples in nature of the way **dominion** was designed to be demonstrated and of the God of nature who could be **trust**ed, those lusting after power or wealth or position would exchange "natural" relationships that would be normative in their lives, for cult prostitutes (either male or female). This focus on power was a perversion of the way Yahweh has always wanted to show God's love to fragile humanity.

If we follow the Bible study practice of looking at the context, understanding the principles, being aware of the present truth for that time we can understand Paul's concern and frustration with those who have had the gospel before them in nature and have refused to learn its lessons. The sexual acts Paul mentions are in the context of stubborn and condemned idolatry. It is a condemnation of an inappropriate use of power to "sway" the gods. In a rare tipping of the hat to a stereotype that women are pictured as being loving tenders of home and hearth, Paul notes that even women in Rome participated in idolatrous acts as part of their lust for power. The results are a clear description that is the antithesis of a loving God; indeed, a portrait of the evil ones. "They have become full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are slanderers, insolent, arrogant, boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless" (vs.29, 30).

Paul is not describing loving, long-term monogamous relationships. He is describing selfish, greedy, idolatrous worship practices performed with the goal of power reminiscent of fallen angels. No wonder he is concerned, forceful, and vocal.

When we attempt, in order to meet our own agendas, to convince believers that Paul had another focus, we are diminishing the power of his call to follow Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God. We are diminishing Paul's plea to turn away from all that is a lust for power and to begin to follow a God who chose to be ***doulos*** (lowest of the house slaves) in order to reach all of us (Philippians 2:6). We are distracting others from the prime message of the gospel.

I Corinthians 6:9

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters, nor male prostitutes nor *malakoi* nor *arsenokoitai* nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

Malakoi carries the connotation of softness, those who live luxuriously in palaces where soft living was the mark of the oppressor. *Arsenokoitai* is composed of two words, *arsen* (male) and *koite* (the term for bed ➢

or, euphemistically, sexual behavior). The use of the term seems to indicate sexual behavior that was self-centered or used to exploit others, much like the Greek male tradition of having young boys as sexual objects. Today we would call that behavior sexual abuse or rape.

These terms, along with the other descriptors of those who cause harm, parallel Old Testament texts describing why Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom. She and her daughters were overfed and unconcerned. They did not help the poor and the needy" (Ezekiel 16:49). This focus is reflected in Isaiah 58: "Is this not the fast I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice…to set the oppressed free…to share your food with the hungry, to provide the poor wanderer with shelter (vs. 6, 7); and in the teachings of Jesus who quoted it. The people described in I Corinthians 6:9 are violating God's principle of **dominion**. They are living for self. They offer a cup of cold water to no one. Indeed, they cause harm to the vulnerable.

The soft-living motif of *malakoi* is in direct contrast to the spiritual goals of Paul. He famously compares the practice of the Christian walk to athletic training and warfare preparation. Living a loving, selfless life calls for a well-honed spiritual constitution. Given the marked contrast between God's principle of dominion—care for the vulnerable (human, animal, or planet)—and the selfishness listed here in this text, it would make sense that the people who insisted on opportunistic behaviors would not have a place in the kingdom of God.

Again, the textual discussion and condemnation is not about an orientation that leads to life-long, monogamous relationships. It is a call to return to the principles of Eden: Heaven-like dominion, selfless interactions between humanity, worship of the true God, and acknowledgement of His creatorship. The policies we have read over today are denunciations of idolatry or of the denigration of human beings, in several of its forms.

For Us Today

Ironically, the principles expressed in the verses often referred to as "the clobber texts" are focused on trusting God, understanding that dominion means service, and growing into the unselfish nature of our Loving Re-creator. When these texts are used to clobber others, they are doing the opposite of the intention of the writer and of the One who inspired the writers. They tear down a person's sense of worth before God, they destroy the ability to have emotionally intimate and honest relationships, they create an environment of fear and mistrust, they twist the meaning of the Bible authors, and thereby, I believe, "bear false witness" against them. They misrepresent the character of God.

Some have used these verses to suggest gay and lesbian people should not have the same choice offered to heterosexual Seventh-day Adventists: to marry someone to whom they are attracted or to remain celibate. These people say that lesbian and gay people should seek their salvation by marrying heterosexual people or by being celibate. Imagine the harm to the self-esteem of a heterosexual mate wondering why he or she is not found sexually desirable. Imagine the effect of being forced to live a celibate life when all the research indicates that people in loving relationships live longer. To deliberately ask people to make choices that will shorten their life is a form of genocide. I cannot believe that a God who focused a desire for intimacy would promote these options. How can people grow to understand the relational object lesson given to us in Eden—the intimacy between members of the Deity—unless we can grow in a relationship with someone with whom we can share the deepest levels of emotional/sexual intimacy? It would be denying us the opportunity to learn one of the fundamental gifts of Eden.

One of the great gifts of our Seventh-day Adventist heritage is our history of corporate spiritual self-examination. We have pitted our policies and practices against Biblical principles and made changes through time. At one point Ellen White told her son not to focus on the work with black African-Americans in the American South. At one point in time we had pork at potlucks. When Ellen White sat for a portrait now hung in the General Conference office, she was wearing a coral necklace. We have ordained women pastors, not ordained them, and are now considering ordaining them again. We have been saddened by divorces. After Ellen White's death we made a policy disfellowshipping people who remarried after a divorce. Today,

Women's Events

– Karen Wetherell

We're scheduling get-togethers for women at least once a month in different Kinship regions or chapters. Stephanie and Joy were adventuresome enough to host our first event on August 23. Five people shared dinner and so enjoyed their time together that they are planning more shared meals (at least once a quarter) and possibly some vespers.

For those of you who might be considering being hosts (or editing the Kinship cookbook) Stephanie included the menu for the day: Strawberry lemonade, Veggie or Turkey Burgers (with the works and optional grilled onions and mushrooms), Roasted garlic and red potatoes, Roasted corn, Cashew casserole, Garden fresh cucumbers.

**If you can't feed a hundred people,
then feed just one.**

- Mother Teresa

➢ ***Eden's Gifs*** *(continued from p. 12)*

in practice, many congregations ignore that policy, understanding the complicated possibilities for the break-up of a relationship. We are not a church of creeds. Ellen White wrote that the truth will continue to dawn as the day approaches. We have a history and an encouragement to improve our policies, our corporate practices, and our personal behaviors as we better understand God's priorities.

In a time when the children of Israel believed that all illness or variations from God's original intent was caused by sin, a blind man came before Jesus. One of the disciples asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he should be born blind?" Jesus replied, "Neither this man sinned nor his parents. This happened so that the work of God can be manifested in his life" (John 9:1-3).

Could it be, in the issue of dealing with our lesbian, gay, transgender, and intersex Adventist "siblings," that no one sinned? Could it be that "this happened so that the work of God can be made manifest"? Could it be that in following the counsel of Isaiah to lift the heavy burdens that we will develop new ways of interacting with and embracing our church family?

What think ye? ▽

Special appreciation to Ben Kemena who continues to make me think deeper and write more clearly.

Kinship Australia – *Noel Thorpe*

We are supporting the Australian Gay & Lesbian Christian Network which specifically ministers to gay and lesbian people of faith and religion. As part of that network we are urging the Australian government to change the Marriage Act and remove the discrimination currently experienced by same-sex couples.

European Kinship Meeting 2009 – *Mike Lewis*

We are excited that new Kinship Europe members will be attending our meeting north of London. Our speaker has a way of keeping even those of us who are known for dozing in church awake and thoughtful. Our holiday is a wonderful manor house in Dorset. If any of you would like to join us please feel free to contact Mike Lewis at kinship_uk@sdakinship.org.

Kinship Netherlands – *Ruud Kieboom*

On October 4th Kinship Netherlands will have its second meeting in the town of Emmen in the northeast of the country. During this meeting we will continue our conversation about being Adventist and gay. We're also planning time to have fun and lots of laughter. New people who were not able to attend the first meeting will join the group. If you have not attended the first meeting and would like to join us in our second meeting, please contact Ruud at kinshipnetherlands@sdakinship.org for information. Conversations will be in Dutch.

Also in October we want to organize a get-together for both Dutch and non-Dutch residents living in The Netherlands. This meeting will be in English and will take place in the house of Kees and Ruud in Den Haag (The Hague). If you live in The Netherlands or are just visiting the country in October and would like to join this meeting, contact Ruud at the address above.

Germany – *Ruud Kieboom*

As part of our autumn meetings we are planning a dinner for members of Kinship Germany (the former HAD group) in Frankfurt. We are working out the final date with a German pastor who will be our host. Those of you who are on our Kinship and HAD list will be getting details of our "dinner date" soon! We are looking forward to seeing you.

**You can't change the past
but you can ruin the present
by worrying over the future.**

- unknown

Seventh-Gay Adventists

Daneen Akers

At Kampmeeting in Seattle this summer, I had the privilege of meeting dozens of LGBT Adventists as well as their family and friends. I was there with my husband, our baby, and a camera listening to stories as part of our new documentary film project, *Seventh-Gay Adventists*.

An attendee who was there under a pseudonym asked me why we were making this film—after all, we aren't gay, we don't have any gay family members (that we know of), and the chance of this project being financially lucrative is likely slim to none. The answer is really quite simple: it's because of story. In retrospect, this film began slowly, over lunches, discussions, movie outings, city walks. Several LGBT Adventists (or "recovering" Adventists) began attending *Second Wind*, the small spiritual community that we've been a part of for the past three years in San Francisco.

Suddenly things like constitutional law and New Testament theology that had been abstract had a human face. People that I knew and loved and who knew and loved me were being impacted by policies, doctrines, and e-mail campaigns. I no longer could sit quietly out of the fray.

Our first foray into activism came because of Prop 8, the constitutional amendment that now bans same-sex marriage in California. Besides working the phone banks, we collaborated with four other Adventists who were actively opposing Prop 8 and formed *Adventists Against Prop 8*, an online petition/website asking the Church State Council to rescind their vociferous support of Prop 8. We argued that the Adventist church had long defended a firm separation between church and state and protected minority rights, even when the church disagreed with the minority on principles and practices.

The effort sparked a lot of attention, even spawning a copy cat (for Prop 8) website and ultimately gathered over 1300 signatures including dozens of scholars, pastors, thought leaders, and students.

The November election was extremely bittersweet for me. I was eight months pregnant and deeply hoping that my daughter would be born into a country and a state that was stepping into hope and unity and out of fear. The election of the first African-American president thrilled me, but the passage of Prop 8 in California, especially after the intense fear-mongering that characterized the end of the campaign, left me very disappointed.

Stephen and I, along with the other *Adventists Against Prop 8* collaborators, agreed that we needed to do more, go farther, dig deeper the next time.

Given Stephen's film background, and my love of talking to people (Stephen might say my inability to keep my mouth shut!), the clear next step for us was to make a film. We'd produced another documentary together a few years ago (http://www.LivingWithFM.com), and we both had found the process gratifying.

When we learn each other's stories, we can't help but grow in empathy and compassion. It took story, not finely-honed arguments to change our minds and get us engaged, so why should we expect it to take anything different for anyone else?

We're still in the beginning stages of pre-production and production, but we hope *Seventh-Gay Adventists* will be a powerful vehicle to share stories, start meaningful conversations, and slowly change hearts and minds both inside and outside of the church.

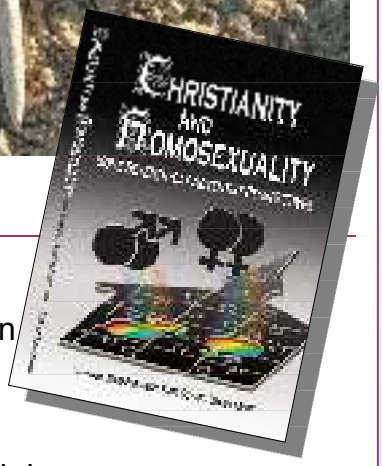
The project is officially sponsored by the San Francisco Film Society, which means that it has non-profit status. So look for a fundraising plea coming soon to an inbox or mailbox near you! Truly the film can't be made without a groundswell of support.

We're still looking for stories (not to mention encouragement, advice, large sums of money, babysitting while we shoot interviews, and other miracles), so please don't hesitate to contact me. You can read more about the film at http://www.sgamovie.com. Please drop by and sign up for our newsletter and our Facebook group at a minimum. Hopefully we'll be at a Kinship chapter meeting near you soon with our camera (and our child so, seriously, the babysitting request isn't hyperbolic!). ▽

Daneen Akers is a new mom, grad student, producer, and writer. She's a contributor to Spectrum *and the author of* LifewithLilybird.com, *a blog about the adventure of parenting. She'll be writing a regular column for the* Connection *about how* Seventh-Gay Adventists *is progressing*.

You are invited to a weekend of

8306 S. Old Oregon Inlet Road,
Nags Head, NC 27959



We have reserved a cottage in Nags Head, North Carolina, across the street from the ocean for the weekend of September 25-27, 2009.
The ocean will still be warm.
We have ordered sun-drenched days.

Our focus for this weekend is to make room for discussions of *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*, using the discussion questions at the end of each chapter. You can pick which topics interest you.

There were be time for walks on the beach, board games, meals cooked and eaten together, laughter and making plans for further beach weekends.
Some supportive members of a North Carolina Adventist congregation are looking forward to meeting and spending this time with Kinship members. We're going to have a very relaxed schedule.
The beach house has three floors, two kitchens, and room to comfortably sleep up to 28 people. $ 75 per person covers both room and board.
You can either drive or fly, or come by train to Newport News (Virginia) and be picked up there.

For more information: contact Catherine at region1@sdakinship.org

To register go to http://www.sdakinship.net/sdakinship/ and click on "The Beach and The Book".

connection

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Editor : Catherine Taylor
Circulation : Fred Casey
European editor : Ruud Kieboom
Photography : Karen Wetherell, Pearl Pangkey, Ivan van Putten
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Cost $ 200.00 for one person / $ 300.00 for a couple
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For more information you can contact Catherine or David
at Region1@sdakinship.org.

To register and access Events,
visit sdakinship.org

We are looking forward to seeing you soon!